

**Abstract**

An apparatus for identifying a requested level of service for a transaction wherein the transaction may be processed in accordance with the requested level of service. The invention is preferably embodied in computer readable program code stored in suitable storage media, and comprises, program code 5 for selecting the requested level of service for the transaction, and program code for assigning the requested level of service to the transaction. The transaction is preferably a packetized signal comprising at least a data packet having a service tag associated therewith, wherein the service tag includes the requested level of service. The requested level of service can be any suitable 10 factors or combination thereof, and can be assigned at any point on the network. The service tag is read from the transaction using suitable program code (e.g., at a load balancer), and based on the requested level of service, the transaction is directed to and processed by a network device that is best able to provide the requested level of service.